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Action theory in Habermas and educational practices

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Abstract

In this paper I explore the potential for viewing education as an “unrestricted communication community” (Habermas 1990: 88), using categorisations from Habermas of different kinds of action as analytical tools for examining educational practices. For the paper, I pursue two main themes: 1) how the concept of communicative action in relation to the three forms of knowledge-constitutive interest (Habermas 1987) can be operationalised in educational discourse 2) how the distinguishing of communicative action and discourse ethics from other forms of action may be used to understand the interaction taking place in educational contexts to develop evaluative tools for examining teaching practices. The potential of this framework for encouraging critical reflection on teaching, on critical incidents in teaching, peer observation, or tutor observation of novice practitioners is also discussed in relation to the forms of reflexivity that Habermas identifies as necessary conditions of human freedom (1996). Taken together, these different constructs form a powerful framework for critically examining the truth and validity claims both explicitly made and implied in educational practices from the perspectives of the individual as well as the professional community to which the individual belongs. It is accepted that a rational, communicative action aimed at reaching consensus does not necessarily dominate either the school or the higher education institution’s normal mode of discourse. Thus, the paper also differentiates other forms of action, incorporating these into the overall critical framework.

Keywords: communicative action, action theories, Habermas

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In his postscript essay ‘Knowledge and Human Interests: a General Perspective’ Habermas refers to the ancient view that “The only knowledge that can truly orient action is knowledge that frees itself from mere human interests and is based on Ideas – in other words, knowledge that has taken a theoretical attitude.” (Habermas 1987: 301) Pursuing this notion of theorising as rising above the everyday preoccupations that characterise the ‘performative attitude’ of actors, he incorporates into his schema of the ‘theoretical attitude’ a conceptual element that represents the stance “that frees those who take it from dogmatic association with the natural interests of life and their irritating influence” (1987: 303). At the same

time, however, he cautions against the mistake of thinking that theory can be freed from human interests, presenting the well-known three-part construct, derived from Apel, of knowledge-constitutive interests through which actors can theorise about and understand their world:

"There are three categories of processes of enquiry for which a specific connection between logical-methodological rules and knowledge-constitutive interests can be demonstrated. This demonstration is the task of a critical philosophy of science that escapes the snares of positivism. The approach of the empirical-analytical sciences incorporates a *technical* cognitive interest; that of the historical-hermeneutic sciences incorporates a *practical* one; and the approach of critically oriented sciences incorporates the *emancipatory* cognitive interest that, as we saw, was at the root of traditional theories." (1987: 308)

Leaving aside for the moment the difficulties of making broad categorisations of this kind, Habermas uses the core concept of knowledge-constitutive interests to support a philosophical argument that allows for different epistemologies to match the different ontologies that follow from the perspective of action based on different interests. The philosophical model he develops is an inclusive or pluralistic one, based on a view of human actors with different interests and intentions whose actions generally can be explained as fundamentally driven by different forms of rationality. The eclecticism of Habermas in constructing this framework is another facet of his pluralism: he borrows from phenomenological sociology, symbolic interactionism, philosophy of language, critical theory, Parsonian functionalism, Kantian and Hegelian thinking and many other sources. This eclecticism is partly due to his view that the development of rationalisation is a cumulative process in which old paradigms remain as residual intuitions (1996b) but it is also a function of the core tenets of his theory of communicative action: that the basic mechanism of human rationality is the capacity of human actors to reach agreement through no force but the force of the better argument. As a guiding construct and core ethical principle for educators, this belief in the rational capacity of all human actors to reach agreement through rational discourse on matters of fact and value seems a fitting starting point for thinking about the intentions and actions of educators. It is fitting because it is inclusive in relation to ways of working aimed at establishing truth and rightness; it avoids the entrenched position-taking of confrontational approaches (without losing the criticality inherited from the critical theory tradition); and it takes an idealistic view of human actors as capable of learning and reaching agreement. None of these points, however, is made without recognition of the difficulties involved in pursuing a course based on faith in human rationality and capacity to do what is 'good' (by common agreement).

The optimism referred to above does not inhibit criticality. In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987b), for example, the technical-cognitive human interest is related to instrumental reason and the formation of expert cultures in the modern, capitalistic state: "As instrumental, reason assimilated itself to power and thereby relinquished its critical force ..." (1987b: 119). Here, he acknowledges Foucault's critique of reason as a form of knowledge-power: "A gaze that objectifies and examines, that takes things apart analytically, that monitors and penetrates everything, gains a power that is structurally formative for these institutions. It is a gaze of the rational subject who has lost all merely intuitive

bonds with his environment and torn down all the bridges built up of intersubjective agreement, and for whom, in his monological isolation, other subjects are only accessible as the objects of non-participant observation.” (1987b: 245) Even here, however, in his summing up of Foucault's analysis, we can detect the grounds of his objection to the postmodern critique of reason and that is in his depiction of the rationality of actors in the lifeworld as holding both a potentiality for self-entrapment (especially through the distorted ideologies of the system world) and a potential for emancipation (through exercising their rationality potential in critical discourse). In the Foucauldian critique of reason, the sciences of psychology, pedagogy, sociology, political science, cultural anthropology are all seen as 'intermeshing' in institutions to form a technology of power. The critique of reason as power-knowledge is acknowledged by Habermas as a great challenge to the notion of a universal rationality rooted in the three categories of knowledge constitution, but one that must be countered if the descent into relativism is to be avoided. Foucauldian analysis provides a powerful means of analysis of the way that rationalised systems in education, such as outcomes-based curricula, quality assurance systems, assessment regimes can discipline both educators and learners, forming new subjectivities through the exercise of “humble modalities’ of power and disciplinary procedures (Dwyer 1995, Edwards and Usher 1994). Such a critique has been applied to educational settings, especially to examine the effects of bureaucratic procedure, hierarchical surveillance and examination practices such as self-monitoring and self-assessment against ‘objective’ criteria (Ball 1994, Edwards and Usher 1994, Hall and Millard 1994).

The examination of micro-practices of disciplinary power in Foucault is replaced in Habermas by the more general concept of ‘steering systems’ of money and power, for example in the second volume of the 'Theory of Communicative Action (Habermas: 1987c). Here, he proposes that we think of societies as both lifeworlds and systems simultaneously and of lifeworlds as being increasingly subjected to the logic of systems thinking. The lifeworld, which we can think of as “... represented by a culturally transmitted and linguistically organised stock of interpretive patterns.” (1987c: 124) relevant segments of which come into focus and are opened up for problematisation in a particular action situation. Through communicative action, social actors draw on the relevant background assumptions of the lifeworld, yet there is also the potential here to draw away from what is taken granted. The action situation thus holds the potential for both social reproduction and change. Thus the potential for new understandings is immanent in communicative action in that cultural givens can be problematised: “Every step we take beyond the horizon of a given situation opens up access to a further complex of meaning, which, while it calls for explication, is already intuitively familiar. What was then ‘taken for granted’, is transformed in the process into cultural knowledge that can be used in defining situations and exposed to tests in communicative action.” (1987c:133)

At the same time, however, the increasing complexity of modernisation brings with it an extension of the regulatory functions of the steering systems of capitalist economy and bureaucratic power. The irony is that “The rationalisation of the lifeworld makes possible the emergence and growth of subsystems whose independent imperatives turn back destructively upon the lifeworld itself.” (1987c: 186) System world is seen as encroaching into or colonising the lifeworld, to the

extent that given ways of thinking are hidden "in the pores of communicative action" (1987c: 187). The imperatives of system world are variously understood as owing their features to the structures of formal or instrumental rationality, growing specialisation and expert systems, a process of rigidification of norm-free ways of seeing the world steered by media sub-systems, resulting in a fragmentation of consciousness and a loss of meaning. Although the general drift of this critique has much in common with critical theorists prominent in the educational field (eg Apple 1995, Kellner undated) the application of Habermasian critical theory thinking to educational practices is not extensive. This paper makes some moves towards trying to explore the implications of operationalising Habermasian concepts, including those dealing with the exercise of power in educational settings. What Habermas seems to offer is not only the critique, but also a way out of the pessimism that the critique leads us towards: The ideological straightjacketing of lifeworlds can be overcome by the same kinds of processes of rationality that generated expert knowledge and bureaucratic systems. To apply this thinking to educational contexts requires us to conceptualise the educational field in lifeworld terms (to imagine education as a lifeworld within the lifeworld), and thence to think of the actors in educational contexts as displaying both this potential to break out of the constraints of their current taken-for-granted understandings and to be able to isolate and analyse those aspects of lifeworld that are systems driven and not necessarily in the interests of the actors in that lifeworld. The concept of lifeworld is also useful because it draws our attention towards the particular contexts and practices, traditions and norms in the educational field that serve as background assumptions for actors.

Habermas mounts a defence against relativism that can be detected in his discussions of the second category of knowledge constitutive interest: the practical interest. In our everyday attempts to work together to agree on collective actions in the world, we demonstrate a communicative rationality, the process of which is universal, even though the contents and focus of such communicative action are locally and linguistically bounded. Communicative action takes place in a lifeworld that "... forms a horizon and at the same time offers a store of things taken for granted in the given culture from which communicative participants draw consensual interpretive patterns in their efforts at interpretation. The solidarities of groups integrated by values and the competences of socialised individuals belong, as do culturally ingrained background assumptions, to the components of the lifeworld." (1998b: 298) The *processes* of communicative action, within different linguistically and culturally bounded life worlds are the same: Habermas is arguing for the universality of rational processes by which actors attempt to come to agreement on what is true and right. Thus it is always a possibility that social actors guided by very different background assumptions can reach agreement. This same 'root of rationality' is also the potential source of resistance to colonisation of lifeworld by the formal rationality of power (bureaucracy) and money (capitalist economics). These potentials for agreement and critique are also taken here to be fundamental to the application of his ideas to educational contexts.

Now to return to the notion of different knowledge-constitutive interests. In communicative action, we as actors refer to the three 'worlds': the 'objective' world

out there ("the totality of entities concerning which true propositions are possible" 1996a: 310); a normative world in which we feel obligations; a subjective world we can either disclose or conceal. And in referring to those worlds we make claims that can be subjected to the rules for judging validity that apply to those worlds: rules that apply to truth claims, those that apply to claims to what is right or just and those that apply to judging our authenticity and intentions as participants in communicative action. The basis of such judgements is the notion of intersubjective agreement, a pragmatic position that Habermas claims does not have to lead to a relativistic notion of truth, because, as Cooke (in Habermas 1999) observes, Habermas has developed a notion of truth as a 'process' and a regulative idea, the mechanisms of which - the propositional structure of knowledge; the teleological structure of action and the communicative structure of speech (Habermas 1996a) - provide the roots of a universal human rationality. Here, in a discussion of the 'idealising presuppositions' of communicative action, is a different way of expressing the notion of an underlying common rationality potential:

"We encounter a different kind of idealization in the interpersonal relationships of language users who take one another 'at their word' and hold one another to 'be answerable'. In their cooperative dealings with one another, they must mutually expect one another to be rational, at least provisionally." (2005: 94)

In other words, when we enter into a rational discourse aimed at reaching agreement and understanding with other actors, each participant has to assume each party has an equally valid rational position on the matter of the discourse for any communication to proceed. This does not of course preclude the possibility that another's rational stance is a deception and that there are in fact other motives for the interaction. For a fuller discussion of the issues here, see Habermas (1996a) for an exploration of illocutionary and perlocutionary communication. However, the mutual assumption of a valid rationality helps us to frame the communicative action that can take place in the educational field, such as that between educators espousing different ideological positions: no discourse can take place at all between such parties if the idealising supposition of mutual rationality does not apply. Where it does not apply (as is often the case) other forms of action are resorted to, often entailing the use of some kind of force (imposition, resistance). Again, one would hope that there remains a place for the rational pursuit of questions of truth and rightness in the formation of our educational goals and ideals!

In 'Some Further Clarifications of the Concept of Communicative Rationality' (1996a) Habermas introduces a modified construct of knowledge-constitutive interests when he outlines the various dimensions of reflexivity that enable us to obtain the distance from our everyday 'natural attitude' that is part of taking up the 'theoretical stance'. Here, he talks about these forms of reflexivity as forms of self-relation:

- the epistemic self-relation (reflexivity to our own beliefs and convictions);
- the technical-practical self-relation (reflexivity to our own instrumental interventions in the objective world and success-oriented dealings with others);

- the moral-practical self-relation (reflexivity to our own norm-regulated actions;
- an existential self-relation (reflexivity to our own life project)

For Habermas "...a person's ability to distance himself in this way in these various dimensions from himself and his expressions is a necessary condition of his *freedom*." (310) Here, then, on the level of self rather than the intersubjective is the same kind of framework, reminiscent of the discussion of knowledge constitutive interests and of the 'three worlds', which provides a structure within which we can theorise, with each part of the structure having its own concerns, procedures for argumentation and standards for evaluating validity. The same model and constructs can thus be used as an analytical frame for introspective discourse as for intersubjective discourse.

From these preliminary considerations, we might interpret Habermas' concept of theorising as the modes in which we can, as individuals (reflexively) and collectivities (intersubjectively through mutual construction of understandings and agreements) gain some degree of control of the lifeworld. Through reflection and rational discourse we are able to agree on what is the case or what should be done and from such agreements we are able to act upon the world. For Habermas, the lifeworld has both individual-internal and intersubjective-external connotations, but his work privileges the latter:

"Subjects acting communicatively always come to an understanding in the horizon of a lifeworld. Their lifeworld is formed from more or less diffuse, always unproblematic, background convictions. This lifeworld background serves as a source of situation definitions that are presupposed by participants as unproblematic. In their interpretive accomplishments the members of a communication community demarcate the one objective world and their intersubjectively shared social world from the subjective worlds of individuals and (other) collectives." (1984: 70)

What interests me is the potential for using frameworks derived from Habermas' thinking on these matters for exploring the intersubjective engagement of educators (with learners, colleagues, other interested parties) and as procedural guides for exploring educational issues. The latter has been the subject of a previous paper (Garland 2007), so here I will confine myself to the former potential: the use of a framework based on Habermasian theory as a tool for the evaluation of practice by individuals (reflectively) and collectivities (intersubjectively).

To continue: for Habermas understanding, and especially mutual understanding, is seen as an accomplishment, the more so as our cultural stock of knowledge becomes increasingly "decentred" (Habermas 1984: 70). Indeed, the "decentration of world understanding and the rationalisation of the lifeworld are necessary conditions for an emancipated society." (1984: 74) By decentring, Habermas means the way in which actors must move away from their own local contexts of action when considering questions of what is true or right: "An absolute claim to validity has to be justifiable in ever wider forums, before an ever more competent and larger audience, against ever new objections. This intrinsic dynamic of argumentation, the progressive decentring of one's interpretative perspective, in

particular drives practical discourse” (2005: 109) Decentring is thus an essential aspect of the mode of theorising we are constructing here: the questioning of previously held certainties; attempts to resolve ethical dilemmas; imagining how others might construe an educational issue differently - all require actors to loosen themselves from the bounds of individual experience and local taken-for-grantedness and be charitable towards the assumed rationality and worth of other positions. The capacity to ‘decentre’ and take the theoretical attitude is open to all social actors, but is clearly not necessarily taken advantage of by all. This capacity is an essential attribute of the theoretical stance and has special functions for educators and educational researchers, because of their particular (though not exclusive) responsibilities for the well-being and development of other members of society.

Countering this potential for decentring, the lifeworld of cultural assumptions and pre-existing knowledge can also be a potential prison in which the naive perspective of the natural attitude dominates. Paradoxically, Habermas sees those very same rational processes and structures which define our universal humanity as the mechanisms whereby we can free ourselves from the natural attitude through the process of discourse and subject aspects of that lifeworld to a more rigorous process of truth, validity and authenticity claims: “With this model of action we are supposing that participants in interaction can now mobilise the rationality potential – which according to our previous analysis resides in the actor’s three relations to the world [objective, social and subjective] – expressly for the cooperatively pursued goal of reaching understanding.” (1984: 99). Similarly, elsewhere he refers to these relations to the world as springing from “the rational infrastructure of human language, cognition and action” (1990: 23).

It is not my purpose to explore the many aspects of this formulation of knowledge-constitution here, nor to deal with the criticisms levelled, except perhaps to acknowledge that the implication taken by some that all natural science is instrumentalist (the practical or technical interest) is demonstrably untrue (see, for example Hammersley, 2003). What is of interest here is the way the typology of knowledge constitutive interest can be operationalised in relation to the three ‘worlds’ predicated - the objective, the social and the subjective – as a practical tool for educators to help frame their thinking about educational practices.

We have, then, an action theory, based upon a central understanding of the capacity of humans who use communication to solve problems and come to agreements in a lifeworld which is increasingly susceptible to rationalisation through the ability of participants to theorise their lifeworld, using the very communicative tools which have constructed that lifeworld. There are, in addition, the paradoxical effects of an instrumentalist rationality that distorts the lifeworld through the ‘steering systems’ of capitalism and bureaucratic power, the discussion of which preoccupies the second volume of the *Theory of Communicative Action* (1987c). This raises the issue of how actors can penetrate the ideological within the lifeworld and resist colonisation of thought and practice by systems that are driven by money and power. In Habermas, taking the theoretical attitude of discourse ethics is the way in which ideological distortions can be problematised, exposed and transcended.

In the theory of communicative action, the validity of any truth claim is judged according to the 'rules' that apply:

"The concept of reaching an understanding suggests a rationally motivated agreement among participants that is measured against criticisable validity claims. The validity claims (propositional truth, normative rightness, and subjective truthfulness) characterise different categories of a knowledge embodied in symbolic expressions." (1984: 75)

Habermas proposes a theory of argumentation in which "normative claims to validity are *analogous to truth claims*." (1990: 56) and this resemblance is seen in his insistence that valid norms must deserve recognition by all concerned. This leads to the position that, "Only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity *as participants in a practical discourse*." (1990: 60). The form of discourse that ensues in the attempt to reach agreement on what ought to be done and what can be agreed on as true is characterised by Habermas as a movement beyond the normal taken-for-grantedness of everyday communicative action: "By entering into a process of moral argumentation, the participants continue their communicative action in a reflexive attitude with the aim of restoring a consensus that has been disrupted." (1990: 67) In other words, the Kantian categorical imperative has been modified to include the need to submit our validity claim to others "for purposes of discursively testing its claim to universality" (1990: 67). Here, Habermas is referring to what he calls elsewhere (2005) an 'idealising presupposition' in that for a validity claim to be agreed all would have to be participants in such a discourse. The conditions for such discourse, outlined in Habermas (2005: 106-7) and summarised below, can be taken as the ideal conditions of educational discourse:

1. inclusiveness: no one who could make a relevant contribution should be excluded
2. everyone should have the same opportunity to speak
3. there should be no deception on the part of the participants
4. there should be no coercion: only the force of the better argument should prevail

To summarise, the concepts from Habermas discussed so far can provide a framework for understanding the task of reflection on practice as a theoretical stance taken by the practitioner that involves attaining some distance from the 'natural attitude' the educator takes when in the performative mode of everyday action. The notion of different 'worlds (objective, intersubjective, subjective), each entailing different ontologies and epistemologies, provides us with a framework for examining validity claims by helping us identify what category of claim we are dealing with and, consequently, what 'rules' for judging validity might apply. The framework can be operated on both a personal, reflective level and on an intersubjective, discursive level and thus can be used by educators to examine and question practice in a number of ways. His theory of communicative action requires us to accept the idealising presuppositions that humans are competent, rational and capable of reaching agreement over matters of truth and morality. The optimism of his stance is a suitable position for educators to adopt in that it implies a) faith in our capacity to accumulate knowledge (though this knowledge is always

open to revision) b) an inclusive rather than confrontational process of conducting educational discourse c) a belief in human competence and rationality that aligns well with the fundamental values of educators as expressed in the aspirations of educational proposals throughout the world (aspirations for democracy, citizenship, participation, social responsibility, etc)

If we take intersubjective contexts first, the application of these concepts entails the idealising presupposition that the educational setting is viewed as an “ideal speech situation” or “unrestricted communication community” (1990: 88). It is only by adopting this position that the rest of the framework can be applied. Clearly, as Habermas frequently reminds us, the reality of much of social life is that other forms of action, especially strategic action with its associations with force, deception and winners-losers is uppermost. The educational field is hardly exempted from such observations. Yet, however loosely defined, teachers share a lifeworld of common practices, the majority of which form the background assumptions of their practice. Of course there is much conflict, for example between competing discourses of child- and subject-centredness; between liberalising and disciplinary roles of educators; between notions of education as outcome and education as process. Within the lifeworld of an educational establishment such as a school, such competing discourses may become a focus of attention and discourse in the theoretical mode that Habermas describes. Whilst the character of such discourse might be more ‘adversarial’ than consensual in aim and tone (Alexander 1997), there is also an underlying desire to reach agreement in much educational discourse that demonstrates the fundamental principle of communicative action. I am suggesting here that the practices of education, at any level, should be governed by the desire to reach mutual understandings through communicative action. Before developing this argument, I need to recognise other forms of action.

Habermas distinguishes communicative action from the following other forms of action: teleological (deciding among alternative courses with intention of achieving an aim); strategic (the agent has to take into account at least one other actor’s likely decisions); normatively regulated (the agent must comply with a norm of behaviour); and dramaturgical (presentation of self to a social group). When we consider these other forms, it is clear that communicative action does not necessarily dominate either the school or the higher education institution’s normal mode of discourse. However, I believe that most if not all educators would agree that communicative action, as defined below is our ideal desired form of communication in educational settings:

“communicative action refers to the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or by extra-verbal means). The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement. The central concept of *interpretation* refers in the first instance to negotiating definitions of the situation which admit of consensus.” (1984: 86)

The framework suggested so far, however, lacks sufficient theorisation of the power dynamics of educational settings. In his exploration of the concept of the public sphere (Habermas 1997) Habermas refers to “specialised systems of action

and knowledge that are differentiated within the lifeworld” (1997: 360). These systems are divided into two kinds: those such as religion, education and the family which become generally associated with the reproductive functions of the lifeworld; and those, such as science, morality and art that “take up different validity aspects of everyday communicative action (truth, rightness or veracity)” (1997: 360). Whilst the first systems are thought of as functional and the second kind refer to a third feature of communicative action: that of the “social space generated in communicative action” (1997: 360).

In terms of educational contexts, we could now apply these concepts, albeit ambiguously, to formulate an action theory perspective on educational practices. Firstly we have, in the latest part of this exposition the beginnings of a suggestion that the educational setting can be viewed from a number of perspectives: from a functionalist perspective, we can examine the reproductive functions of educational processes; from a knowledge generation perspective educational institutions espouse values such as the importance of seeking truth, debating and agreeing what is right, and honesty and integrity in carrying out educational discourse. Although the public sphere is intended by Habermas to refer to the “network for communicating information and points of view” (1997: 360) a space within the lifeworld that offers the possibility of communicative action, it is of course also subject to manipulation and steering by specialist systems such as pressure groups and other groups whose intentions are not transparent (strategic action). At an initial level, then we have a model that captures the notion of educational functions, purposes and possibilities:

educational functions	educational values
Reproduction of established forms of knowledge eg transmission of a body of knowledge deemed foundationally important eg from physics?	Creating new knowledge. Theory development. Theory testing.
Reproduction of values considered desirable eg democratic values, citizenship, rights and responsibilities	Discursive search for solutions to ethical issues and dilemmas. Anticipation of ethical consequences of new knowledge eg genetics.
Social reproduction eg sorting and categorising people according to standards of achievement; setting; streaming; academic pathways	Critique of established practices. Analysis of ideological aspects of what is held to be obvious or true. Questioning the justice of established practices.

Additionally, we can incorporate the notion of reflexivity discussed earlier, we have a basic model, derived from some of the key concepts in the work of Habermas for conducting an analysis of educational practices in relation to the truth claims, the normative elements and the intentions of the actors participating in that practice. Below I have attempted an initial sketching out of the kinds of questions that might be used to operationalise this action theory for analysis of educational practices. At the moment it takes the form of a number of key questions that seem to be implied by the foregoing discussion. It would helpful if, during my session,

colleagues were able to 'test' the model and give feedback on what is needed to refine it.

For any given educational practice (an assessment regime, a curriculum, a lesson, a teaching practice, etc), we might ask the following questions:

1. What is the nature of the learning activity here?
2. Is there clarity about what is to be learnt or is there unpredictability? How does the clarity/ambiguity relate to the content and purposes of the learning?
3. Are we engaged in primarily a reproduction of unquestioned 'truth'? If so, what are the rules for judging the adequacy with which that knowledge is transferred? Are the outcomes clear and measurable?
4. Are we engaged in knowledge and theory construction? Is there an element of newness (for all) that marks this activity out as in some ways unpredictable? If so, by what standards do we judge the efficacy of the process? Can we talk about outcomes at all? If the activity involves exploration or theory testing, can we judge the adequacy of the processes undertaken?
5. Can I articulate my position on the nature of the learning activity? Are there a number of positions that I am holding at the same time? Can I hold these different positions with integrity or is there a conflict? How do I deal with this conflict? Is it possible to continue without a resolution?
6. What are the key values being promoted or explored?
7. If reproduction of values, are these considered desirable by those taking part (eg democratic values, citizenship, rights and responsibilities)?
8. Does the practice entail a discursive search for solutions to ethical issues and dilemmas? Does it entail anticipation of ethical consequences of new knowledge?
9. Am I able to articulate these values? Am I able to hold these values at a distance for the purpose of validity testing and discussion? Or are some of these values unquestionable? Am I in conflict with the values that are to be promoted?
10. To what extent does this educational practice contribute to the reproduction of wider social processes or structures?
11. Is the function of this practice primarily social reproduction eg sorting and categorising people according to standards of achievement; setting; streaming; academic pathways?
12. Does the practice include critique of established practices? Is the justice of established practices questioned?
13. If the practice has wider social implications, are there issues of injustice here? If so am I implicated?
14. What is the dominant mode of educational practice here? Is it communicative action? Imposition? Deception?
15. How does my analysis here fit with my own personal sense of integrity? What must I do to secure that integrity if it is threatened?

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